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THE EMPEROR'S VISIT -- END OF AN ERA

by Lee Seaman

The Emperor's pending visit to the United States is receiving a great deal of publicity in the Japanese press and considerable coverage overseas. Here we have tried to present some of the deeper implications of this trip. Some readers will find little new in the following. We hope for others it will contribute another piece in the puzzling relationship of Emperor, emperor system, Shintoism, and Japan's military.

-- Eds.

The Emperor Hirohito is traveling to the United States this month. A theater dedication in Washington, D.C. Gifts of cherry trees on the West Coast. Innumerable handshakes with dignitaries from the President down. International goodwill flowing like hot rice wine.

Many Japanese wish that's all the visit meant. However, they say, its significance for Japan domestically -- and for the Japanese people -- runs far deeper.

The visit ties into a trend which surfaced in Japan in the late 1960's, according to these Japanese. The nation suffered a tremendous spiritual dislocation in 1945. Now, thirty years into the "post-war era," Japan seems to be turning in search of its spiritual roots. And these observers, who include many Japanese Christians and intellectuals, fear the most likely path is the familiar one back to a structure where the Emperor stands as the center column, supported on either side by traditional educational principles and the loyalty and submission of the people. This structure is currently in disrepair, but various conservative citizens and ultra-rightist groups are diligently working to clear the weeds off the path and are urging the entire nation to gather once again under the old familiar roof.

Statements that Japan is moving back toward the right meet with frequent scepticism here. The voluntary Self-Defense Force (Japan's post-war constitution prohibits an army) struggles to meet its yearly recruitment goals, and young people seem to know more about the Osmond Brothers than about goings-on in the Imperial Household. Organized rightist groups are contenting themselves with "behind the scenes" maneuvering, and any growing spiritual traditionalism still lies below the nation's surface. But Japanese traditions run deep, and some of the country's leading Christian thinkers feel a return to pre-war patterns is far from impossible. For explanation, they point to Japanese history.

The Japanese Spirit Rises --- and Falls

In 1868 a faction of Japan's military overthrew the decaying military dictatorship, and with Emperor Meiji at the nation's head Japan began its race to catch up with the West. Leaders reasoned that Japan would modernize faster if the people had a strong sense of national identity, and so they set about forging the Japanese nation-state. This centered on the Emperor, a god personified who was both the physical and spiritual leader of the nation.

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EMPEROR'S VISIT (cont'd)

To add credibility to the Emperor's divinity and to counter the influence of the encroaching Western colonial powers and their Christianity, national leaders adopted the ancient indigenous Shinto faith as a uniquely Japanese religion. Schools taught the State Shinto doctrine of a divine Emperor descended directly from the gods which created Japan. The Emperor was father and head of the Japanese national family, source of all things and to whom all things were owed.

In 1869 Yasukuni Shrine was established in Tokyo to honor the soldiers who had died for the Emperor in the preceeding civil war. Souls enshrined there as "war gods" were honored by the entire nation, particularly after 1938 when Japan's ultranationalism and the "Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" were at their height. The government promoted death for Emperor and Empire as life's highest honor and noblest purpose. Soldiers leaving for the front separated with, "We'll meet again at Yasukuni." Over two million souls had been enshrined there by the end of World War II.

The nation at war had no lack of commitment. Life had a definite purpose within the Emperor-subject relationship. There was an abundance of "Japanese spirit."

The Emperor's surrender on August 15, 1945 stunned most Japanese. Shock followed shock. A foreign power occupied the motherland, the Emperor was forced to renounce his divinity, Shinto was severed from the state and Yasukuni Shrine lost its government ties. Teachers directed their baffled students to paint whole pages out of their history texts.

Occupation forces did not execute the Emperor, as had widely been expected. He stayed in his palace, but under carefully limited and controlled conditions. Instead of destroying the core of the nation's spiritual system, General MacArthur determined to chip away most of its power while leaving the form as a human "symbol of the nation." The Occupation-authored constitution transferred all real power to a national Diet elected by popular vote. Some rightists have charged that this "blue-eyed Constitution" crushed and all but destroyed the Japanese spirit.

For the first desperate years, most people didn't have time to feel the loss. First there was hunger, and by the time most people had enough to eat and to wear, Japan's "economic miracle" was on its way. Some Japanese say that the GNP replaced the Emperor as god. Real per capita income skyrocketed. From a flush toilet and television, expectations leaped to a car and air conditioning and then to a suburban home and travel abroad. In the fifties and sixties a few vocal rightists called for strengthening of the emperor system and a return to traditional values. But most people found the new Japan more comfortable. They dedicated themselves to their companies, filled their new houses with furniture, and didn't worry too much about the Japanese spirit.

In the 1970's, though, many Japanese see significant changes in the national attitude. Students worry that life has no central theme, that there is no great cause to devote themselves to. Industry, the mainstay of Japan's growth, has spawned pollution which not only is destroying much of the country's natural beauty and endangering some of its food supply, but has also crippled and killed hundreds of Japanese. The energy crunch brought numbing inflation, causing a crisis of faith for those who believed in Japan's famed "economic miracle."

In Search of Spirit Again

It is within this context that rightists today are urging a return to the emperor system. Japanese Christians and other opponents of this trend see danger

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EMPEROR'S VISIT (cont'd)

in several areas. One is the new pressure to reinstitute "moral education" in Japanese schools. This, they fear, could easily return to pre-war patterns of indoctrination in unquestioning, absolute loyalty to the Emperor and the state. Another is the changing climate of public opinion. They see increasing interest by the public in the Imperial Family, and lessening tolerance to criticism of it.

But perhaps the most widely publicized struggle between rightists and their opponents has been over the action to re-nationalize Yasukuni Shrine. "The Japanese people must rescue their country from spiritual poverty and empty materialism by reseeking traditional values and remembering their debt to Japan's war dead," say the proponents of nationalization, often also those who call for a return to the old emperor system as the foundation of a new Japan.

Opponents of nationalization object that ties are close between Yasukuni and the old Emperor worship and that the mystique surrounding the Emperor, while diminished from its pre-war level, remains powerful. Japanese have lived, worked and gone to school under a democratic constitution for less than thirty years, they point out, and the old thought patterns lie just below the surface. Nationalization of Yasukuni would be the first knot in new ties between the state and Shinto, and this, they say, must be avoided. William Mensendiek said in the *Japan Christian Quarterly* (Summer 1974), "For Japan the problem is not the same as the Western one of church and state; (in Japan it was) not the collusion of organized religion and the political establishment, but the utilization of a religious mentality by a political regime."

In the middle of all this, many Christians feel that government leaders are pulling the nation to the right. Prime Minister Takeo Miki paid his "respects" at Yasukuni Shrine on August 15 this year, though forced to do so as a private citizen rather than officially. And as before the war, the government is also saying that Yasukuni Shrine represents Japan's national heritage and is really not a religious issue at all.

The Bill to Nationalize Yasukuni Shrine has been introduced into the National Diet every year since 1969; so far it has been defeated each time. This year Yasukuni supporters attempted to introduce new legislation which would permit the Emperor, government leaders and Self-Defense Force Guards to worship publicly and officially at the shrine without nationalization. Opposition forces prevented the bill from being presented.

The Emperor's Visit and the Search

But back to the original question. What does the Imperial visit to the US have to do with all this? Much of the visit's significance is rooted in the Japanese concept of "era." Emperor Hirohito is 74; rumor has it that he may retire after this trip, but even if he does not, his reign cannot last much longer. His death or retirement means a new Emperor, a break with the past. This change even alters the Japanese calendar. When a new Emperor ascends the throne a new era begins with a new Year 1. Some consider it a sort of national fresh start.

The end of the Showa era has particular significance. Emperor Hirohito symbolizes for many the era of Japan's greatest power, but also of its greatest humiliation. Ultra-rightists particularly feel the Emperor "sold out" to Allied forces by surrendering and renouncing his divinity, and many of them are looking for a new unstained Emperor to again stand at Japan's national core. And even for those who do not consider the Emperor fatally flawed by the events of 1945, this trip to visit Japan's former enemy nation cannot help but symbolize history brought full circle. The visit closes not only Emperor Hirohito's mixed career with its reminders of humiliation for many Japanese, but it finally brings to an end the

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EMPEROR'S VISIT (cont'd)

entire post-war era which included occupation, a restructuring of the government by outsiders, and military helplessness and dependence on the United States.

Meanwhile, those who oppose a return to traditionalism for Japan fear that the visit, while marking a virtual end for Emperor Hirohito, will give a new boost of prestige to the emperor system in Japan. The upcoming trip has been frequently in the news since late August; journalists expect it to dominate the Japanese press for the first two weeks of October. Coverage of the Emperor here has traditionally been uncritical, using only the materials authorized by the Emperor's press office, and there is no reason to expect a change during this trip. So the emperor system will be further legitimized within Japan by a barrage of positive publicity, especially because this trip is to the United States. (Some Christians and others here further criticize the trip as yet another indication of Japan's emphasis on ties with the Western world and down-playing of Asian relations. "He should have gone to Asia," said one pastor, "where Japan's greatest war responsibility lies.")

Thus the trip has potential to be used in many ways, both by mainline conservatives who would like to see Japan move a little farther to the right and by the ultra-rightist groups who will be satisfied with nothing less than a new Emperor, a new era, and a new sense of divinity at the center of a faithful nation.

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KOREAN CHRISTIAN LEADERS SENTENCED

In a crowded Seoul District Courtroom on Saturday morning, September 6, Judge Kwak Dong Hun declared four top south Korean Protestant pastors guilty of "embezzlement and misuse" of church mission funds and sentenced the men to between six and ten months in prison.

The Rev. Kim Kwan Suk, general secretary of the Korean National Council of Churches, was sentenced to six months in prison. The other three pastors, all related to the Seoul Metropolitan Community Organization (SMCO) were sentenced as follows: Rev. Park Hyung Gyu, 10 months; Rev. Kwon Ho Kyung, eight months; and Rev. Cho Seung Hyuk, six months. In each case, the judge gave credit for time already served--five months--meaning that at least Revs. Kim and Cho could be released by early October.

The situation is complicated, however. The prosecutor in the case, Lee Jae Kwon, announced after the sentencing that he would seek stiffer sentences by appealing to a higher court. Although it is legally understood that the men may be released (perhaps on bail) pending an appeal, it is questionable whether the government will permit release. Meanwhile, the KNCC Ad Hoc Committee for the Protection of Mission has also decided to appeal the District Court ruling to a higher court.

The trial, which opened in early June, centered on mission funds channeled through the KNCC by Bread for the World (headquartered in Stuttgart, W. Germany) for SMCO projects. While the government charged that the four pastors had "embezzled" the equivalent of several thousand dollars, not even the prosecutor took the charge seriously. The government's purpose in the case, say Christian observers was clearly to harass and disrupt the KNCC, SMCO and other Christian bodies which have been seriously struggling against problems of poverty, dictatorship and denial of basic human rights in recent years. The concerns, which these organizations define as a pursuit of Christian mission, the south Korean government sees as political agitation. The Christians object that the government

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KOREAN CHRISTIANS (cont'd)

wants to define Christian mission within government-imposed limits.

The embezzlement charge was questioned on July 5 when Rev. Wolfgang Schmidt, secretary for Asian affairs of Bread for the World, told the court in more than two hours of testimony that SMCO use of BFW funds had been "appropriate, legitimate and justifiable." This and similar testimony forced the judge to admit his own doubts even while sentencing the men. According to the *Chungang Ilbo*, a Korean-language daily, the judge on September 6 told the court and 400 spectators that at many points he "could not recognize" the embezzlement aspect of the case but that he still felt that the defendants "should be severely punished for assisting those people who violated the Emergency Decrees, thus harming national security by wrongly using funds from overseas sources to take care of the poor."

During the August 2 hearing, defense lawyer Lee Sei Jung asked the prosecutor, "Who is the injured party? Do you have any evidence ... that the 'misuse' of funds has injured anyone?" Prosecutor Lee replied, "SMCO itself is the injured party. In other words, the offender and the offended are one and the same." He called for prison terms of three to five years.

August 2 was to have been the final hearing before sentencing, scheduled for August 16. But the sentencing date was postponed and another hearing called for August 30. The official explanation was that testimony of prosecution and defense witness conflicted, and the judge needed to hear two more witnesses. Most observers said that the government was merely prolonging harassment of the prisoners. The August 30 hearing was devoted mostly to going over the final statements of the prosecutor -- who had hardened his position since his August 2 summary -- the defense lawyers and the defendants.

Excerpts from the defendants' original statements to the court follow:

KIM KWAN SUK: "I think the church should be guaranteed the right to solve its own problems fully. The processing of such a case in the courts is in and of itself an infringement of freedom of mission and a violation of the spirit of the Constitution of the country. During the period of the 1919 Independence Movement, the Korean Church, on the basis of its belief that the Church should stand on the side of the oppressed people, provided an opportunity for people to sublimate their spirit of nationalism. As a result the Korean Church came to believe that the Church's responsibility is to liberate all people from any kind of suppression. Now, I think, more than what has happened in the past, the events of the future will be much more of a problem. This trial is being held not only in front of the people, but also in front of God."

PARK HYUNG GYU: "Even if I am sentenced to 20 years, I hope the name of my crime will be announced extremely carefully. Even Jesus himself, when He was sentenced to die on the cross, had his 'crime' placed on the cross: 'King of the Jews'."

CHO SEUNG HYUK: "I have always done my work believing that the first priority of mission is to work for the conscientization of people who are oppressed by organized society, so that they themselves can discover the way to break through this oppression."

KWON HO KYUNG: "More than freedom of faith, I want to espouse the freedom to act according to one's faith. Only when we can speak according to our conscience does our existence have worth. As I see it, Korean law is not for all the people but is only a means to achieve one individual's purpose. This Land has raised me and taught me all I know. I have learned from this Land and have tried to live according to what I have learned. So why am I here? Each time I stand here before the court, I cannot find the solution to this question."

AMERICAN GRAFFITI UPDATED -- IMPRESSIONS ON THE UNITED STATES TODAY

by Toshi Kusunoki

Kusunoki-san joined the Frontier Internship Program in September of 1972. For about five months he monitored the situation of foreign workers (gast arbeiter) in Germany as part of his orientation to his project in California. After language training, he pursued the theme of ethnic minority problems in the U.S. as seen on the West Coast, focusing primarily on Asian Americans and Chicanos. He recently returned home to Japan, and is now working at the National Christian Council of Japan (see JCAN #479, July 25, 1975). He will be sharing his United States experiences and observations with JCAN readers over the next few months. Here, he comments on his impressions of racism in California. -- Eds.

The San Francisco Bay Area was getting ready to greet its dull winter. It might have been winter already by then. It was, after all, hard to tell.

I finally had a chance to go down to one of California's agricultural valley towns. The local Greyhound from Oakland drove and stopped, drove and stopped through acres after acres of vineyards, olive orchards and the totally brown valley scene. La Sierra, San Joaquin Valley, the heart of California's agribusiness.

Black passengers predominated in and near the Bay Area. The farther south the bus rolled, the more brown faces occupied the seats. Our driver changed twice on the way, from one pale-face to another and on to another as though they were all telling us, "You, brown faces and black faces, take any seat you want, front row or back. But we are not going to yield this driver's seat to you." At each depot I saw through the window some brown faces doing cafeteria work, cargo-loading -- everything except driving buses. Once along this particular route, I recall seeing a black driver sitting behind the wheel.

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While in Oakland I was introduced to a group of Pilipino (that's how they say it) Americans, mostly in their fifties and older. The young, relatively new immigrants on the West Coast were not news to me. Most of them are professionals, technicians, and skilled or semi-skilled workers. But these elderly Pilipinos, respectfully called "manongs" by their community people, were totally new to me. Many of them once worked in the fields of California, Arizona and Washington. These are the people who were at one time "positively prohibited" from entering public places of many valley towns that their sweat and tears had made prosperous.

Many Asian immigrants to the West Coast carry their individual histories of discrimination in one form or another. Among them all, the Pilipinos may have had it worst. They were allowed to come to the U.S. to work, to work under incredibly bad conditions. Many came via the sugarcane and pineapple plantations in Hawaii. What they were not allowed, among other things, was to bring their wives with them or to invite Pilipino women in the hope of marrying and raising families in the new country. And interracial marriage at that time was forbidden for them.

As a result, a majority of the manongs have no families today and practically nobody to rely on. And their story has not been told, despite its value for understanding the roots of racism which is so integrated into the backbone of America. The story remains hidden despite all the contributions these people have so far made to the building of the Golden West. Many of the manongs will be dead within ten years. Who, then, will remain to tell us their story?

Everyone has a story to tell to the world. It is precious, for it is a testimony of each individual's life that cannot be re-lived by anybody else. Have we all grown so arrogant as not to listen to their testimony?